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DEVELOPING STORM

Experts agree that it's a terrible idea to build in or along floodways, where water moves fastest after a large storm. But here, such development has been allowed routinely — and it's being proposed again.

Melissa Phillip / Houston Chronicle

Sand and debris piles up along Lang Loop near the San Jacinto River in Banana Bend in east Harris County.

In Houston's worst flood zones, development worth $13.5 billion

By Mark Collette and Matt Dempsey

Two months after Hurricane Harvey, the city of Houston spent $10.7 million to get nearly 60 damaged houses out of the flood plain.

A week later, developers went to City Hall, asking to build 900 new houses in it.

Meritage Homes, one of the nation's largest homebuilders, proposed a 151-acre development at the former Pine Crest Golf Course in northwest Houston, 2 miles east of Addicks Reservoir. It's on Brickhouse Gully, where city and county officials had already bought out more than 30 homes to reduce flooding before Harvey. They are in the process of buying 15 more.

Part of the Meritage plan was about to slip through City Council largely unnoticed before Cynthia Neely, a member of an anti-flooding group, raised an uproar.

"Why are we doing this if we're just going to repeat the process and let it happen in a new development?" Neely wondered. "It makes no sense."

Bruce Norcini fought the city's attempt to prohibit floodway construction.

The Meritage proposal would not just be in the flood plain but also along a more critical and vulnerable area: a floodway, loosely defined as the center of the wider flood plain. It's where water moves fastest during a 100-year storm.

Experts on flooding agree that it's a terrible idea to build in or along these channels of cascading floodwater. But Harris County and Houston have allowed 20,000 parcels worth $13.5 billion to be developed in or along them, a Houston Chronicle investigation reveals.

Structures in and near floodways cause water to pile up behind them. They raise the overall height of floodwaters after major rains, pushing water across more land, just as ice cubes displace water in a glass.

About 75 percent of buildings on those 20,000 parcels in or along the floodways were built before 1985, before the first 100-year flood elevations for Harris County were published. But about 1,400 struc-

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» *Floodway lessons from Tulsa.* **Page A12**

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Nature ruled; man reacted. Harvey was Houston's reckoning.	Cheap premiums, billions in debt. Families get trapped, taxpayers soaked.	Build in a floodway? It's the Houston way.	Fort Bend levees were designed for the 100-year storm. Is it enough?	How Houston's growth weakened the dams that made it possible.	Developments around Barker: risky reservoir business.	They tamed the North Sea. What can the Dutch do for Houston?

» *See a map of construction in floodways at* ***houstonchronicle.com/developingstorm***

Scandal costs GOP a seat in Senate

Jones' win gives new hope to Democrats in deep-red Alabama

By Kim Chandler and Steve Peoples
ASSOCIATED PRESS

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — In a stunning victory aided by scandal, Democrat Doug Jones won Alabama's special Senate election on Tuesday, with massive turnout among African-American voters helping defeat Roy Moore, a candidate enthusiastically backed by President Donald Trump despite a litany of sexual misconduct allegations.

It was the first Democratic Senate victory in a quarter-century in Alabama, one of the reddest of red states, and proved anew that party loyalty is anything but sure in the age of Trump.

The Republican loss was a major embarrassment for the president and a fresh wound for the nation's already divided GOP.

"We have shown not just

GOP continues on A13

Judicial nominee under fire

GOP senator asks Trump to reconsider Mateer over remarks

By Kevin Diaz

WASHINGTON — Even as President Donald Trump rushes to fill federal judicial openings across the nation, a top Senate Republican is urging the White House to put the brakes on an outspoken nominee from Texas.

Iowa Republican Chuck Grassley, chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, said Tuesday that he told Trump to "reconsider" two controversial judicial nominees: Jeff Mateer of Texas and Brett Talley of Alabama.

"I've advised the White House they ought to reconsider," Grassley told CNN. "I would advise the White House not to proceed."

Mateer, a top aide to Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, was nominated by Trump to be federal judge in Texas. He has

Mateer continues on A13

Love born from loss unites pair of Woodlands hospital volunteers

After both lost their spouses, they first grieved together, then found joy again

By Alyson Ward

After her husband died, Ginny Pinkham used to go into a hospital chapel in The Woodlands to be alone.

A hospital chapel is that sort of place — a room to pray, to grieve, to find some quiet and search for peace.

But on Tuesday, the small, angular room became a space for celebration, a bright place filled with flowers and family as Pinkham, 70, married for a second time — this time to the man who helped her forge through her grief and learn to laugh again.

When Pinkham and Terry Maddeaux, 71, met two years ago as volunteers at Memorial Hermann The Woodlands Medical Center, they both were hurting.

Pinkham's husband — they'd been married since their teens — had died

Couple continues on A13

Melissa Phillip / Houston Chronicle

Bride Ginny Pinkham and groom Terry Maddeaux walk down the aisle Tuesday in the chapel of the hospital where they met.

POLITICS

Trouble over tweet

Democrats decry President Trump's tweet lashing out at Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, calling it sexist and unsavory. **PAGE A7**

SPORTS

Happy to be home

Former walk-on turned football team captain Chris Pezman is introduced as the 11th athletic director in UH history. **PAGE C1**

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